

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 1721

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, VN
SUBJ: SITUATION IN SAIGON

REF: CALCUTTA 1679

1. REFTEL GIVES DETAILS ON CASE OF LE THI NGOC MAI, VIET-NAMESE NATIONAL AND FORMER EMPLOYEE OF IBM SAIGON WHO LEFT SAIGON JULY 8 AND HAS APPLIED IN CALCUTTA FOR PERMISSION TO ENTER THE US. DURING HER INTERVIEW WITH CONSULAR OFFICER, MS. MAI SPOKE FREELY AND AT LENGTH ABOUT HOW AUTHORITIES IN SAIGON ARE USING IBM EQUIPMENT AND ABOUT GENERAL SITUATION IN SAIGON. MS MAI IS NEARLY 26 AND SAYS SHE WORKED FOR IBM FOR SIX YEARS. THOUGH WE HAVE NO MEANS OF JUDGING HER RELIABILITY, SHE SEEMED INTELLIGENT, COMPETENT, VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT HER JOB, AND VERY LEVEL HEADED. FOLLOWING REPORTS HER COMMENTS.

2. MS. MAI STATES THAT THE NEW VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT IS EXTREMELY INTERESTED IN THE MAINTENANCE AND PROGRAMMING OF THE IBM MACHINES AT SAIGON AND TON SON NHUT. THEY HAVE SENT NUMEROUS MEMBERS OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY (NVA) TO SAIGON FOR TRAINING BY PRESENT MEMBERS OF THE IBM STAFF. MS. MAI
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STATES THAT WHILE THE EQUIPMENT AT THE IBM/SAIGON OFFICE IS

"NOT VERY MODERN" (IBM 360-40) THE EQUIPMENT AT TON SON NHUT IS "MODERN AND SOPHISTICATED" AND IS OF GREAT INTEREST TO THE NVA TRAINEES. THE TEACHERS ARE TWENTYFOUR IBM/VIETNAM CUSTOMER ENGINEERS (CES) WHO WERE IN SAIGON WHEN THE OLD GOVERNMENT FELL. THEY ARE BEING SUPERVISED BY ONE DUONG KY NGA, AGE ABOUT 35, BORN IN SAIGON WHO WENT NORTH WITH HIS FAMILY IN 1954. HE IS DESCRIBED AS BEING BRILLIANT IN THE COMPUTER FIELD AND HAS SHOWN HIMSELF VERY CONSIDERATE OF THE CES. HE ALLOWS CES CONSIDERABLE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ARRANGES ADDITIONAL RATIONS FOR THEM. MS. MAI OBSERVED THAT ONE WONDERS IF HE WILL BE AS KIND WHEN HE AND HIS COHORTS COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND IBM PROGRAMMING. A PROBLEM WHICH HAS NOT YET BEEN RESOLVED IS THAT OF SUPPLIES FOR THE IBM MACHINES (I.E., PAPER, PARTS, ETC.). SHE ESTIMATES THAT AT THE MOST THERE IS A SIX MONTH SUPPLY OF THESE ON HAND, AFTER WHICH IBM MACHINES WOULD CEASE TO FUNCTION IF NOT FURTHER SUPPLIED. FURTHER SHE NOTES THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT YET BEGUN TO PROGRAM COMPUTERS FOR THEIR OWN USE. AT PRESENT THEY ARE STILL USING THEM FOR TRAINING OF FOR TAKING OUT INFORMATION ALREADY CONTAINED THEREIN.

3. MS. MAI SAYS SHE CONTINUED TO WORK AT IBM SAIGON OFFICE UP UNTIL A FEW DAYS BEFORE HER DEPARTURE ON JULY 8. DURING THIS TIME SHE TALKED WITH NUMEROUS COMPUTER ENGINEER/TECHNICIANS FROM THE NORTH WHO STATED THEIR PREFERENCE FOR IBM EQUIPMENT. SHE WAS TOLD THAT RUSSIAN EQUIPMENT WAS "CLASSIC AND OLD" AND REQUIRED DAILY MAINTENANCE; IBM EQUIPMENT REQUIRES ONLY WEEKLY OR MONTHLY UPKEEP.

4. MS MAI AND ANOTHER RECENT REFUGEE FROM VIETNAM SPOKE WITH DEEP CONCERN OF THE PLIGHT OF THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF ARVN AND THE GSVN WHO HAD BEEN SENT TO REEDUCATION CAMPS. SHE SAID SO MANY HAVE NOT RETURNED OR BEEN HEARD FROM THAT THEY HAVE BEEN LITERALLY GIVEN UP FOR DEAD. THE FEW WHO HAVE RETURNED REPORT THAT THOSE WHO ARE IN THESE REEDUCATION CENTERS ARE SO ILL-TREATED THAT THEY HAVE CONTRACTED DROPSY, ENCEPHALITIS, MALARIA, AMOEBIC DYSENTERY, BERI-BERI, AND ARE "DYING INCH BY INCH." MOREOVER, THEIR FAMILIES ARE GENERALLY WITHOUT MEANS OF SUPPORT, AND MANY WIVES HAVE BEEN DRIVEN TO SUICIDE OR TO "MARRIAGES OF CONVENIENCE" WITH NVA SOLDIERS. MS. MAI SAYS THOSE FEW ARVN ENLISTED MEN AND THE RARE OFFICER WHO DO RETURN FROM THESE
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REEDUCATION CENTERS ARE IN SUCH POOR PHYSICAL CONDITION THAT THEY SPREAD FURTHER ALARM ABOUT THE FATE OF THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET RETURNED. SHE SAYS THIS IS A SOURCE OF CONTINUING AND GROWING ANIMOSITY BETWEEN NORTHERNERS AND SOUTHERNERS.

5. VIET CONG OFFICERS AND MEN ARE DISGRUNTLED BECAUSE THEY SUFFER DISCRIMINATION BY THE NVA AND CADRE FROM THE NORTH. THEY ARE RESENTFUL BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT BEEN GIVEN POSITIONS

OF AUTHORITY NOR SPECIAL PREFERENCE OVER NON VIET CONG SOUTH-ERNERS. HOW DEEP THIS RESENTMENT RUNS OUR SOURCE WAS NOT ABLE TO GAUGE BUT SHE INDICATED THAT THERE IS MUCH PRIVATE GRUMBLING AND THOUGHT THAT IT WAS PROBABLY QUITE DEEP.

6. ACCORDING TO MS. MAI AND ANOTHER RECENT REFUGEE FROM VIETNAM THERE EXISTS A FLOURISHING BLACK MARKET BOTH IN SAIGON AND IN OTHER CITIES IN SOUTH VIETNAM. THOSE WHO HAVE IN ANY WAY BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE OLD GOVERNMENT MUST SELL THEIR PERSONAL POSSESSIONS IN ORDER TO SECURE SUFFICIENT FOOD TO STAY ALIVE. BUYERS ARE PRIMARILY NVA OFFICERS AND CADRE. THE BLACK MARKET IS THE ONLY PLACE WHERE MEDICINE CAN BE OBTAINED, BUT EVEN THEN SULFA DRUGS AND PENICILLIN ARE UNAVAILABLE. GOOD RICE IS ALSO AVAILABLE WHEN BROUGHT IN FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE, BUT RECENTLY THE GOVERNMENT HAS CRACKED DOWN ON PRIVATE ENTERPRISE RICE OUTLETS BY FORCING COLLEGE STUDENTS TO CLEAR THE STREETS OF SMALL MERCHANTS. MS. MAI SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED LE LOI, HAM NGHI, AND TU DO STREETS.

7. MS MAI SAYS FISH IS SO EXPENSIVE THAT THE AVERAGE PERSON CANNOT AFFORD IT, MEAT IS ALSO RARE AND QUEUES ARE AT TIMES NEARLY A KILOMETER LONG FOR A RATION OF A HALF A KILO. VEGETABLES ARE ALSO SCARCE AND EXPENSIVE PRIMARILY BECAUSE THERE IS NOT SUFFICIENT GASOLINE TO TRANSPORT THE VEGETABLES FROM DALAT TO SAIGON. RATIONED RICE IS DIRTY AND CRACKED. MANY IN SAIGON FEEL THAT THE CITY IS BEING PURPOSELY KEPT WITHOUT SUFFICIENT FOOD AND EMPLOYMENT IN ORDER TO PERSUADE PEOPLE TO LEAVE IT FOR "NEW ECONOMIC AREAS." BUT PEOPLE FEAR GOING TO THESE AREAS BECAUSE THEY HAVE HEARD THAT HOUSING AND FOOD IS LIMITED, WORK VERY HARD, AND THAT MANY PEOPLE HAVE DIED. MS. MAI ACKNOWLEDGES THAT SHE CANNOT CONFIRM WHETHER THESE REPORTS ARE TRUE BUT SAYS THE SAIGONESE BELIEVE THESE STORIES.

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8. THE CONDUCT OF HIGHER RANKING NVA OFFICERS AND CADRE, ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES, CONTINUES TO BE CORRECT TOWARDS THE POPULATION IN GENERAL THOUGH THEY HAVE RECENTLY BEGUN TO BE MORE OBVIOUS IN PUBLICLY SHOWING THEIR MISTRESSES AND OCCASIONALLY HAVE BEEN SEEN DRUNK ON THE MAIN STREETS OF SAIGON. (NVA OFFICERS IT APPEARS ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO CARRY SIDEARMS IN SAIGON WHEN OFF DUTY.) LOWER RANKING OFFICERS AND ENLISTED MEN APPEAR TO BE LOSING THEIR ORIGINAL DISCIPLINE WHICH THEY HAD WHEN THEY FIRST ARRIVED IN SAIGON. THEY HAVE BECOME ROWDY AND ABUSIVE ON OCCASIONS. SOME HAVE ACQUIRED SOUTH VIETNAMESE "FAMILIES;" GENERALLY WIDOWS OF ARVN AND GSVN PERSONNEL.

9. BOTH MS. MAI AND THE OTHER VIETNAMESE REFUGEE SOURCE STATE THAT THE SAIGONESE HATE THE NORTH VIETNAMESE FOR THE PRIVATIONS, BOTH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL, THAT THEY ARE NOW UNDERGOING, AND

THEY CONTINUALLY QUOTE HO CHI MINH'S DICTUM THAT "THERE IS NOTHING MORE PRECIOUS THAN INDEPENDENCE AND LIBERTY." MS. MAI AND OTHER RECENTLY ARRIVED REFUGEE BOTH EXPRESSED BITTERNESS OVER USG'S "ABANDONMENT" OF SOUTH VIETNAM BUT MS. MAI SAYS ADVICE SHE WILL CARRY TO ALL VIETNAMESE IN THE US IS THAT THEY SHOULD NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES CONSIDER RETURNING TO VIETNAM.

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